

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
United States Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W
Washington DC 20240

The Honorable Bryan Newland
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
United States Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland and Assistant Secretary Newland:

We write to express our support for your Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative (Initiative), which seeks to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. federal boarding school policies. We understand that the Department is hoping to issue a report in the coming month that describes the available historical records within the Department’s custody and how the Department can help “address the inter-generational impact of Indian boarding schools....” This is a laudable goal, but one that we do not think can happen without more input from tribal communities. We have heard from several Native communities within New York that more consultation needs to occur. For that reason, we are respectfully requesting that you hold a listening session in the State of New York with representatives from each Native Nation.

While the history and federal policies governing Indian boarding schools in New York are unique compared to schools in other states, there is a clear federal nexus warranting the inclusion of these activities in your report on boarding schools. The federal government never operated boarding schools in New York. However, there were Indian boarding schools that received federal funding and where federal representatives sent Native youth, like the former Thomas Indian School located on the Cattaraugus Territory of the Seneca Nation.

From 1855-1957, the Thomas Indian School existed on the Cattaraugus Territory for the primary purpose of educating and assimilating Native children in the State of New York. While the school was managed and funded by the state, there are multiple, documented instances of the school receiving federal support – for example, in 1855 the school’s founder received a personal grant for construction directly from the then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Subsequent annual reports show how the school’s daily operations and upkeep were made possible by generous federal funding and New Deal-era jobs programs. Throughout this time, the school pursued the same assimilationist policies pursued by the federal government and the federally operated schools. Once the Thomas Indian School closed its doors, many of the Native youth were pushed to the

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. This demonstrated record of federal involvement shows a clear reason why Indian boarding schools in New York should be included as part of your Initiative.

The Department's efforts on this issue are significant – yet, if the goal of your Initiative is to shed light on the past traumas caused by Indian boarding schools, the Department needs to take a comprehensive approach and listen to the recommendations from tribal nations. We understand that the Department's Initiative was prompted by the discovery of more than 215 unmarked graves by Canada's Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. This discovery reopened wounds of many Native Nations people in New York, who have close relations to the First Nations in Canada. We add emphasis to the calls of the Native Nations of New York simply seeking an opportunity to share their stories with the Department and have them considered for inclusion in your report. We are hopeful that the Department will be able to conduct a listening session on this subject with the Native Nations in New York.

Respectfully,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



Tom Reed
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



Chris Jacobs
Member of Congress



Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



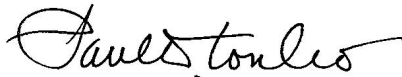
John Katko
Member of Congress



Kathleen Rice
Member of Congress



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress



Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress



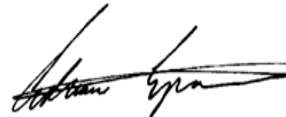
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515



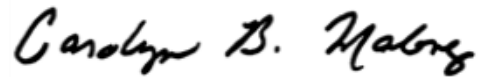
Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress


M.C.

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Claudia Tenney
Member of Congress